All Quiet on the Protest Scene? Repertoires of Contention and Protest Actors During the Great Recession

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5 All Quiet on the Protest Scene?

Repertoires of Contention and Protest Actors During the Great Recession

Sophia Hunger and Jasmine Lorenzini

5.1 Introduction

In times of economic and political crisis, diverse social actors resort to protest in order to make their claims and grievances heard. Attempting to gain political influence, protesters use repertoires of contention which consist of 'limited numbers of historically established alternative performances linking claimants and the objects of their claims' (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 1996: 23). The choice of specific action repertoires allows protesters to increase their visibility and to attract participants to support their claims. In this chapter, we examine the types of protest events and protest actors that prevail over time in the three regions that we study. In so doing, we ask whether and how the Great Recession transformed customary action repertoires in southern (SE), north-western (NWE), and central and eastern Europe (CEE).

As we have seen in Chapter 4, during the Great Recession some countries in the south of Europe saw a rise in protest that corresponds to the idea of a protest wave. These heightened phases of protest often come along with a qualitative expansion of the conflict (Tarrow 1989). The qualitative expansion can take two forms: changes in the action repertoire and a growing diversity of actors involved in protest.[1] Because public attention is limited, social movements need to innovate in order to gain visibility – particularly so, when new social actors enter the protest scene simultaneously. The movements need to renew the ways in which they perform their protests in order to gain social and political attention. Another way to attract media attention is to use illegal or violent actions. These transformations can also take place when governments remain unresponsive to the demands or oppositions

[1] Chapter 4 presents three indicators of expansion: size, radicalness, and originality. In this chapter, we are not interested in the first one, which corresponds to the quantitative expansion of conflict. Instead we consider the other two criteria, radicalness (use of violence) and originality (innovations in the action repertoire), as well as actors involved.

emerging from society. Hence, changes in the contention repertoire are more likely to happen where economic and political crises are at play, but also in countries and regions that have a burgeoning civil society. The Great Recession provided several of these triggers which may lead to changes in action repertoires: increased levels of contention and protest in some countries, new social actors entering the stage in others, and at times unresponsive governments pushing for austerity policies. Hence, we examine contentious repertoires across the three regions to analyse the prevailing forms of action, to see if new modes of action emerged during the crisis and whether protesters used violence.

Repertoires of contention are also important in establishing the collective identity and ideology of given groups of protesters (Taylor and van Dyke 2004). Some movements are known specifically for the type of action that they adopt. Among others, the ecology movement is known for non-violent illegal action such as blocking train convoys or accessing nuclear plants, some new feminist groups are known for subversive action using nudity (showing their breasts) or inversion of stigma (slut walks), and radical right extremist groups are known for their displays of physical violence against immigrants or minority groups. During the Great Recession, research has shown that loose networks prevailed over established organizations (Anduiza, Cristancho, and Sabucedo 2014). Therefore, we analyse the presence of different types of actors to see which actors dominate the protest scene during the Great Recession. We consider the possibility that organized actors appeared later in the protest scene as an indicator of institutionalization.

Using newspapers to code protest events limits the variation in terms of forms of action. This also applies to international news agencies as sources (Taylor and van Dyke 2004). Hence, we explain variations in the use of commonplace and widespread action forms, i.e. demonstrations, strikes, confrontational and violent actions, instead of looking at more fine-grained categorizations of action repertoires. We show how their prevalence changes across different contexts and time periods. Moreover, we would like to note that, contrary to recent research on contention repertoires, we are not interested in the growing role of the internet in transforming repertoires of action. In a digital era, e-political activities range from online activities that support political mobilization offline to online activities that exist solely on the internet (Earl and Kimport 2011; Theocharis and van Deth 2016; Van Laer and Van Aelst 2010). It would be interesting to combine research on protest events taking place offline and e-movements – social movement activities that exist only online (digitally enabled activities) – to understand the degree of protest digitalization during the Great Recession. However, given our

choice to code protest events from media content we focus on offline protest events.[2] The study of online protest requires the use of other sources, in particular, organizations' websites (Kousis and Paschou 2017) and new social media (Theocharis et al. 2015) which allow identifying these forms of actions better than traditional media sources.

In the chapter, we first introduce repertoires of contention and how they transform over time. We account for the prevalence of demonstrations and strikes over other forms of contention across regions and time periods. Then, focusing on transformations observed during the crisis, we show that innovation and revolutionary processes, in the form of violent events, took place only in some parts of the south and they were short lived. Lastly, we turn to actors and show that protest events increasingly feature social groups without formal organizational structures. We conclude by arguing that contention repertoires remained largely unaffected by the Great Recession; demonstrations were and remained the prevailing form of protest across regions and time periods.

5.2 Repertoires of Contention

Protest takes multiple forms, be it a march down the street, a political gathering in a park, a sit-in in front of a public building, or a general strike paralyzing a city. Sometimes it also resorts to illegal or violent action, with some or all of the protesters engaging in a display of strength against authority, destroying property, or clashing with the police. Repertoires of contention are resources used to defend rights, oppose changes, express grievances, or make claims. The forms that protest events take are historically and contextually bound. Past protests, political opportunities, and interactions with other protesters transform action repertoires (Tilly 2008). The organizers' collective identity and ideology also shape action repertoires (Taylor and van Dyke 2004). Furthermore, we explore the possibility that some slight modifications to action repertoires happened in relation to the Great Recession and protest waves.

5.2.1 Demonstrations as the Modular Action Form

Tilly's work on repertoires of contention shows how limited and regularly repeated social movements' performances are (Doherty and Hayes 2018; Tilly 2008). Since the establishment of representative democracies, street

[2] To illustrate the fact that our coding strategy does not capture online activism, we can look at the number of online events that our dataset includes. This corresponds to 7.8 per cent of all the events coded. These online events exclusively take the form of hacking and mail bombings.

demonstrations have become a major form of protest in NWE (Tilly 2008). The nineteenth century came with the establishment of democracies in Europe and important socio-economic transformations such as the rise of the working class and the development of trade unionism. Both contributed to the growing importance of demonstrations. In democracies, the parliament appeared as a new political institution centralizing political power, and citizens developed repertoires of political action allowing them to make their political claims on this institution. Demonstrations enable citizens to demand or oppose changes while showing their strength with regard to what Tilly calls their WUNC – worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment to a cause. Demonstrations offer an important advantage: They are modular, that is, they offer the possibility of addressing multiple issues and making claims on the political institutions, which can decide to legislate on the issue(s) at play (Tarrow 2011 [1994]). For these reasons, demonstrations prevail over other forms of action and, up until this day, constitute the main form of contention on the streets. Given the modularity of demonstrations and their widespread usage across countries, our first hypothesis is that despite the economic and political crises demonstrations were and remained throughout the Great Recession the prevailing form of contention on the streets in the three regions (H1).

5.2.2 From Strikes to the More Encompassing General Strikes

Contention repertoires change only under exceptional circumstances (Fillieule 2010). In the action repertoires of the twentieth century, together with demonstrations, strikes prevailed. However, in the last decades, two parallel trends shaped labour movement activism.

First, the number of economic strikes has been declining (Hamann, Johnston, and Kelly 2013). This can be linked to waning trade union membership (Visser 2013). The decline in strike activities is more pronounced in the north-west of Europe, while in the south trade unions remain stronger – strike activities are common in Spain, Greece, and Italy. Scholars have also pointed out that their number even grew during the crisis (Vandaele 2016). France belongs to this group of countries with high strike rates, while Portugal has a more moderate but still vivid strike scene (Hamann, Johnston, and Kelly 2013). Quite on the contrary, in post-communist countries, the decline of trade unions is even stronger than in the north-west and south (Crowley 2004). In eastern Europe, trade unions have lost members dramatically after the fall of the Soviet Union. They also lost trust and credibility among large shares of the population and workers. Trade unions represent the old

communist regimes and they are one of the few political institutions that survived the transition period (Crowley 2004). Research shows a decline in the number of strikes (Greskovits 2015) even in the period of the Great Recession (Beissinger and Sasse 2014). However, in some countries, trade unions were able to mount protest and organize strikes as a response to austerity (Varga 2015).

Second, there is a growth in the number of general strikes (Hamann, Johnston, and Kelly 2013) or, as some call them, political strikes (Gall 2013; Lindvall 2013). In general or political strikes, protesters addressed their claims to the government and different groups of workers or segments of the population participate in these protest events. The goal of a political strike is to discredit the government, enforcing political and not economic pressure (Gall 2013). The growth in the number of general strikes is associated with widespread cuts in public spending, dismantling of the welfare state, loosening of labor protection, and worsening of working conditions. It is also associated with the government's exclusion of trade unions from legislative procedures (Hamann, Johnston, and Kelly 2013) and with the fading alliance between trade unions and social democratic parties (Gall 2013). The growth in general strikes is most likely in cases in which the unions are neither very strong nor very weak, but rather when they have a moderate power and mobilizing capacity (Lindvall 2013). Among the countries analysed in these studies, Greece appears as an outlier with an exceptionally high number of general strikes (in the data presented by Hamann, Johnston, and Kelly 2013, they represent thirty-three of the seventy-two political strikes analysed).

The decline in strikes and the growth of more encompassing general strikes illustrate the idea that there are instances when institutional or socio-economic changes transform contention repertoires (Taylor and van Dyke 2004). In the late twentieth century, the neoliberal turn reinforced the prevalence of demonstrations over other action forms. As neoliberal reforms challenged the power of citizens and the state, workers built on more inclusive repertoires of action than those of the labour movement. In addition to strikes, they increasingly used demonstrations to make claims related to citizens' rights, not only focusing on workers' rights (Gentile and Tarrow 2009). These union-led demonstrations often took the form of general strikes (Gall 2013; Hamann, Johnston, and Kelly 2013). During the Great Recession, austerity policies reinforced cuts in the welfare state and aggrieved large segments of the population. As the government adopted austerity measures, protests grew across SE (Altiparmakis and Lorenzini 2018). The dismantling of socio-economic rights angered citizens, who took to the streets to

express their grievances (Galais and Lorenzini 2017). General strikes display opposition to the government's adoption of laws detrimental to the principles of social justice, social protection, and workers' rights defended by trade unions. Hence, we expect that the economic crisis with its implementation of austerity policies fostered strike activity as a response to worsening working conditions and loosening of social protection. Our second hypothesis states that we see a rise in strikes, more specifically of general strikes aiming at mobilizing broad segments of the population, during the Great Recession in the south of Europe (H2). We anticipate that in CEE, the economic crisis did not trigger a growth in strike activity because of the weakness of trade unions. In the north-west, because the economic crisis was more limited, we also advance that there would be no increase in strike activity.

5.2.3 Innovations in Action Repertoires

Chapter 4 has shown that the Great Recession resulted in a protest wave in four SE countries, namely Greece, Cyprus, Portugal, and Spain, whereas in NWE and CEE only some countries saw a rise in protest but there were no protest waves. During phases of heightened protest, social movements aim to draw attention to their actions, and the most efficient way of doing so is innovation: using new forms of action that capture media attention and put the spotlight on their mobilization (Tarrow 1989). As protest grows, changes in the action repertoire are more likely. This leads us to postulate that economic and political crises have a transformative influence on action repertoires when a quantitative expansion of conflict happens. Our third set of hypotheses deals with transformations in the action repertoire and focuses on the south of Europe, where protest increased.

We are especially interested in examining the kinds of transformations taking place during phases of heightened contention. The choice of a form of action is always torn between innovation and repetition (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). The former brings surprise, catches opponents off guard, and may trigger media attention, while the latter benefits from widespread recognition and the actors' familiarity with it. In addition, a process of radicalization might take place (Tarrow 1989). As some fringes of social movements radicalize over time, others turn to institutional modes of action. We examine three types of transformation: (1) innovations in the shape of new forms of action designed to mobilize citizens during the Great Recession; (2) the use of violence in attempts to trigger revolutionary processes; and (3) institutionalization of protest with a growing involvement of organizations.

Often novelties build on slight modifications of existing action forms. Sometimes, they adopt or adapt protest events from other social movements (Soule 2004). During the economic crisis, one of the main innovations relates to the establishment of protest camps in the main squares of large cities (Castells 2015). The Arab Spring started a movement that soon took place in many countries around the world under the name of 'occupy'. The camps used in some of the major protest events organized during the crisis served to express grievances, to attract visibility, and also to express agreement with alternative modes of political participation that require time, sustained engagement, and deliberation (Polletta 2014). The occupation of squares served as a way to express both economic and political dissatisfaction. We hypothesize that the major innovation in the action repertoire took the form of occupations and happened only in the region experiencing increased levels of protest, SE (H3a).

The second transformation we analyse relates to violence. Protest wave theory postulates that violence happens at the end of a protest wave, when protest dies out and some social movement actors take the institutional path. For instance, at the end of the protest wave led by new social movements, some environment activists founded Green parties (Kitschelt 1989). In parallel, more radical fringes of social movements resort to political violence to sustain protest and capture media attention (della Porta and Tarrow 1986; Tarrow 1993). Yet, other scholars postulate that violence is an early component of revolutionary processes. Disorderly and violent protest takes place at the beginning of contention before established forces take over the grievances and normalize political actions (Piven and Cloward 1977; Scott 2012). These two theories disagree about the timing of political violence. They lead us to consider two alternative hypotheses on the timing of political violence. We hypothesize that political violence takes place at the beginning of the crisis, before institutional actors take over and normalize protest, again, only in the south of Europe (H3b1). Furthermore, we consider the possibility that violence takes place at the end of the protest wave together with institutionalization (H3b2).

Lastly, we study processes of institutionalization in relation to protest actors. Political violence theories share the assumption that a process of institutionalization and normalization is at play either in parallel with (Tarrow 1989) or after the outbreak of violence (Piven and Cloward 1977). We look at institutionalization regarding the presence of specific types of actors on the streets. When protest grows, it opens political opportunities – elites are more divided, they seek new alliances, and they become less repressive (Tilly 2008). New actors are drawn to the

streets to make claims on the government (Tarrow 1989). Then, in a second phase, a process of institutionalization might follow. This takes place when organizations replace unorganized social groups. For the years of the Great Recession, we expect to see a growing diversity of political actors on the streets where we observe increased levels of protest. Our last hypothesis is that in the south of Europe during the early phase of the crisis the share of unorganized social groups grew and that, later on, organizations prevailed (parties, trade unions, and civil society organizations), hinting at a process of institutionalization (H3c).

5.3 Demonstrations and Strikes: Stability in the Action Repertoires

Turning to the empirical part of our study, we present descriptive analyses to provide an overview of the compositions of action forms. We begin by investigating the development of action repertoires over time by region. Thus, we focus on the qualitative expansion of conflict, and more specifically for this first part on changes in the action repertoire. We also pay special attention to SE countries which experienced a protest wave, i.e. Greece, Portugal, and Spain. Although Italy did not experience a protest wave, we also include it in these additional analyses to give a more complete picture of the south.[3]

5.3.1 Demonstration as the Prevailing Action Form

Figure 5.1 shows the percentage shares of the various forms of action from 2000 to 2015 by region. We use different scales for demonstrations on the left-hand panel, and strikes, confrontations, and violence on the right-hand one, to give more visibility to changes in the less frequent action forms. Although we use a different scale for demonstrations, the attentive reader will already have noticed that demonstrations prevailed during the whole period. They represented roughly two-thirds of the events, with 62 per cent in the north-west, 58 per cent in the south, and 69 per cent in the CEE countries.

The relative shares of demonstration in the three regions changed little over time. The stability of the share of demonstrations in NWE is most striking. In this region, demonstrations represented the same proportion of events when aggregating the three periods. We see only

[3] We do not include additional analyses for Cyprus and Malta because of the small number of protest events included in our dataset for these countries.

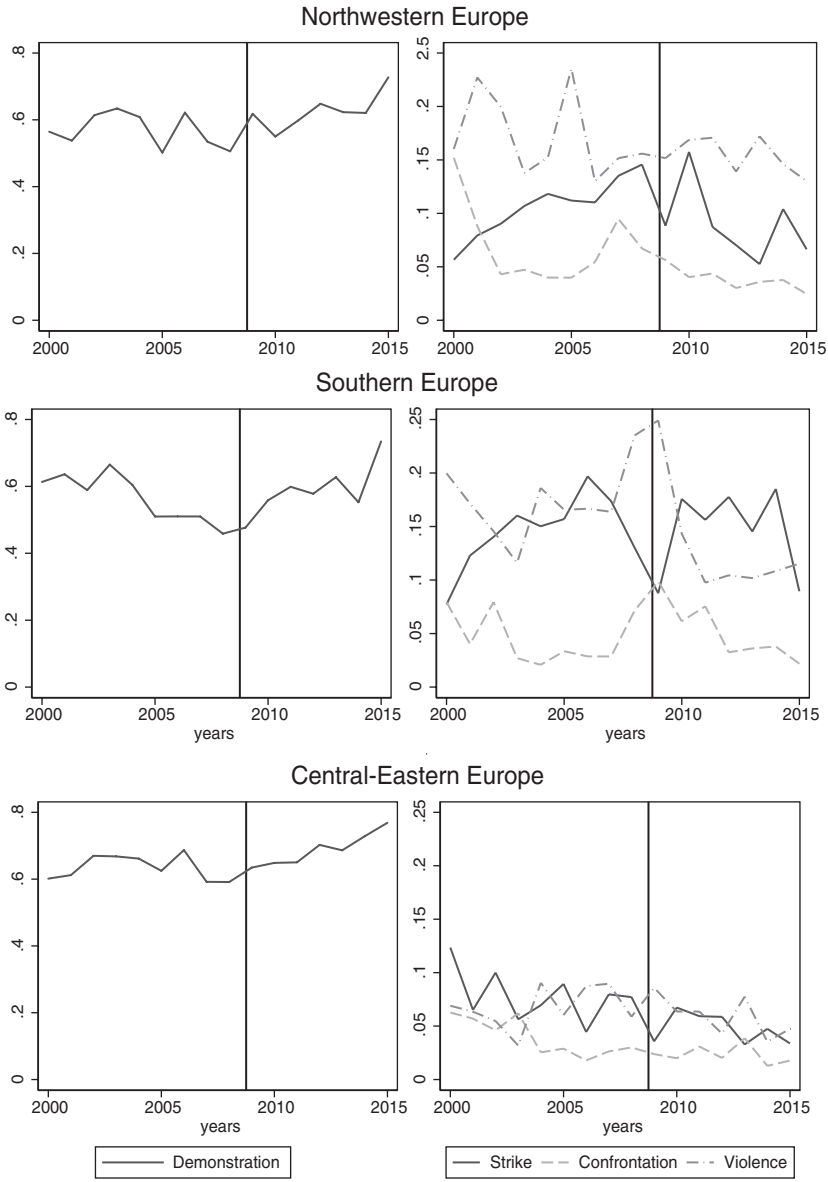

Figure 5.1 Share of demonstrations (left) and other action forms (right) for the three European regions.
Note: The scales for demonstrations and for the other action forms differ to account for the fact that the share of demonstrations is much higher than the ones of strikes, confrontations, and violence.

slight changes in the share of demonstrations in these distinct periods, for instance, a marginal decline before the onset of the crisis in 2008. Most notably, we see an increase in the share of demonstrations when the refugee crisis kicks off at the end of our period of interest. In this region, only Finland and the Netherland stick out with an overall smaller share of demonstrations.

For CEE, Figure 5.1 reveals a steady increase in the share of demonstrations over the sixteen years analysed here. At the beginning of the 2000s, demonstrations represented 63 per cent of all events, while at the end of the period they represented 79 per cent. During the refugee crisis, demonstrations constituted by far the prevailing form of action in the CEE countries. This share is slightly higher than in the northwest and the south of Europe. Turning to country-level data, this trend is very homogeneous across all countries in CEE.

In the south of Europe, stability in the share of demonstrations also prevailed. However, we observe the lowest share of demonstrations during the shock period – the early phase of the crisis. This corresponds to the moment when other forms of action kicked in and gained relative importance in the action repertoire. We will look at this in more details for our third set of hypotheses. In spite of intraregional variance with regard to the intensity of the crisis, no specific country leads the SE pattern. It is mostly consistent across countries. In Figure 5.2, focusing on four SE countries, we see that the share of demonstrations oscillates between 40 and 80 per cent of the action repertoire. In Spain and Portugal, the corresponding share reaches an all-time low before the onset of the Great Recession. While demonstrations steadily increase towards the end of the Great Recession in Spain, there is a decline in Portugal – a country with a less established protest culture (Accornero and Ramos Pinto 2015). In Greece, the share of demonstrations declines right after the beginning of the crisis, in September 2008, when other forms become more important, but then steadily increases during the crisis. Even in this country which experienced an important protest wave, demonstrations prevail over all other action forms. In Italy, the share of demonstration is most stable and fluctuations are unrelated to the Great Recession. These findings suggest that our expectations about demonstrations as a dominant action form hold even in countries most strongly hit by the crisis or where there was a protest wave.

These observations confirm our first hypothesis: Demonstrations were the dominant form of action across the three regions during the whole period. Despite varying trends in the relative share of demonstrations across the regions, demonstrations remained the most common form of protest in Europe, even during the Great Recession. We observe only slight changes in their relative share, such as a drop in

Greece during the shock period. By contrast, although we only cover its beginning, we observe that during the refugee crisis, the share of demonstration increases in all three regions.

5.3.2 Strike as an Important Action Form in the South During the Crisis

Turning to the other forms of protest in the right-hand panel of Figure 5.1, we present the development of strikes compared to political violence and confrontational actions. Here, the scale ranges from 0 to 25 per cent. Generally, and referring to the whole period of observation, NWE and SE are characterized by a more diverse repertoire of action than CEE.

When considering strikes, we see that they represent between 5 and 15 per cent of all events in the north-west of Europe. In the pre-crisis period, we observe an upward trend for strikes, with a sharp decline in 2008 as the crisis hits Europe and a peak in 2010 when the euro-zone crisis kicks in. The year 2010 was marked by numerous industrial actions in many European countries. The organizers were as diverse as Lufthansa pilots in Germany, gas station owners in Cyprus, or doctors in the Czech Republic. However, these strikes fell into a few months of 2010 and culminated in a coordinated European day of protest on 29 September 2010, with 50,000 workers protesting in Brussels.[4] Even in countries with few strikes, we see the relation to the Great Recession, i.e. with judges and prosecutors threatening to walkout as they claimed to be understaffed for the challenges that the bank- and business-related crisis imposed on them in Austria. By the end of the period that we analyse, in 2015, the level is back to the low levels of the early 2000s. Notable outliers are Finland and Belgium, with a steady increase in the relative shares of strikes after September 2008. In the CEE region, in line with the idea that trade unions are weak and that strikes are not a prominent form of action even during the Great Recession, the share of strike is much lower (ranging from 5 to 10 per cent). Furthermore, in this region, we observe a declining trend throughout the whole period.

In the south, the situation is similar to the north-west but there are two notable divergences. The peaks are higher in the south, here the share of strikes ranges from 5 to more than 20 per cent on average. Furthermore, the increase is stable throughout the whole crisis period and it declines only towards the end of the period that we analyse. Figure 5.2 displays the specific situation for the four countries in

[4] Many countries – in the three regions that we analyse here – participated. For instance, there was a general strike in Spain and other industrial actions in Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Slovenia, and Lithuania.

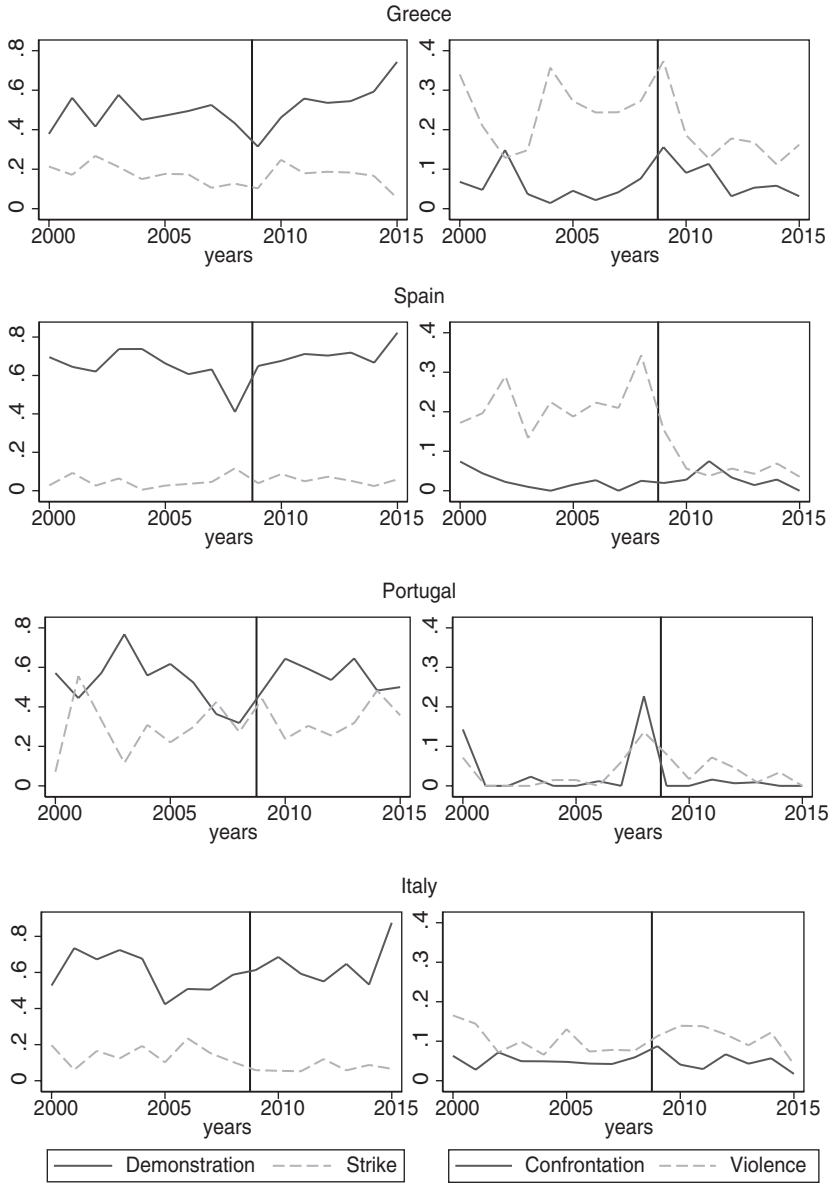

Figure 5.2 Share of demonstrations and strikes (left) as well as violent and confrontational events (right) for four southern European countries.

the south. In Portugal, strikes seem to be nearly on a par with demonstrations and the time trend is rather stable. By contrast, in Greece, Italy, and Spain, strikes play a rather subordinate role compared to other action forms. In Greece, strikes peak at the beginning of the Euro crisis, when the unions initially led the opposition against the government's austerity measures (Altiparmakis 2019a).

So far, we considered all strike activity without distinguishing between economic and general (or political) strikes. Further analyses of our data show that strikes addressing political issues[5] represent only a very small share (2.7 per cent) of all strikes (results not presented here). In general, the share of strikes that address only political issues does not vary over time in NWE or CEE. We observe a very flat line in eastern Europe and a minor peak in the north in 2006. In both regions, the share of strikes addressing political issues, or a combination of economic and political ones does not increase during the crisis. The picture is quite different in the south, where we find more fluctuations over time, with two peaks prior to the crisis (in 2003 and 2007). Interestingly, we observe an increase in strikes that address political issues during the Great Recession. Strikes addressing either political issues or a combination of economic and political issues peak in 2011. There is no difference in the number of political strikes between countries with and without a protest wave. However, Greece is again a notable outlier here. The country faced up to 17 per cent of all political strikes during the Euro crisis, confirming previous findings (Hamann, Johnston, and Kelly 2013). This serves as an additional validation of our data and of our operationalization of general strikes as strikes on political issues.

Our empirical findings fail to support our second hypothesis, which suggests that there is an increase in the relative share of strikes in the south of Europe during the Great Recession. Instead, what we observe is a sharp decline before the beginning of the crisis and a return to the pre-crisis level during the shock period. A majority of these strikes focus on economic issues, we find limited evidence supporting the idea that general strikes grow over time. Our analyses also revealed a common pattern across the three regions, a decline in strike activity prior to the crisis followed by peaks at the onset of the Euro crisis. We interpret this finding as a sign that in the build-up

[5] The coding used for action forms does not distinguish general strikes from economic ones. To compare the two types of events, we consider the issue addressed and we distinguish between strikes addressing only economic issues, only political ones, and those that combine the two issues.

of the crisis workers and unions refrain from going on strikes, but once the crisis unfolds with its economic and political responses strike activity regain intensity.[6] In the north-west, the whole period is characterized by fluctuations in strikes, whereas a steady decline appears in the CEE region.

5.4 Transformations of Action Repertoires During Protest Waves

Our next set of hypotheses address changes in the action repertoires taking place during a protest wave. We pay special attention to the south of Europe and to the period of the Great Recession. First, we consider innovations in the action repertoire. Then, we analyse the timing of violence. Lastly, we turn to protest actors.

5.4.1 Innovation in the Form of Confrontational Actions

We explore changes in action repertoires by examining confrontational actions, which comprise blockades, protest camps, and the occupation of squares. Confrontational actions represent the smallest share of protest actions in the three regions (see Figure 5.1). In the north-west, there are two peaks in confrontational actions in the early to mid-2000s but otherwise their share remains stable at around 5 per cent throughout the period covered. In contrast, in CEE, confrontational actions are in decline throughout the whole period. They decrease from 7 to 3 per cent. Similarly, in the south, confrontational events are only of minor importance, representing between 3 and 10 per cent of all protest events. We also observe a first peak in the early 2000s but more interesting for us, confrontations peak at the onset of the Great Recession and stay at a relatively high level until 2011.

In Figure 5.2, we present separate graphs for four SE countries. The increase at the onset of the Great Recession is mostly driven by the Greek case. There are some early events connected to the Great Recession in September 2008, when airport personnel blocked runways and main roads in Athens. However, the biggest share of this peak is

[6] Strikes are heavily related to the business cycle (Gall 2013). However, researchers disagree about the timing of strikes in the business cycle. Some argue that strikes are more likely to be associated with growth (raising demand for work as an opportunity to set claims) or with recession (when pressure increases on wages and the risk of cuts in jobs occurs).

related to the street riot that broke out after Alexandros Grigoropoulos, a fifteen-year-old student, was shot by police forces. Mass protest and rioting spread to other Greek cities and lasted more than three weeks, with protesters blocking streets and occupying buildings, such as radio stations. In Italy, we find a minor increase in confrontations at the beginning of the crisis. This captures an extended series of sit-ins and blockades against education cuts. Students and faculty in Italian universities and schools protested against the Berlusconi government austerity plan for education. In Portugal, confrontational actions peak prior to the crisis and, in Spain, confrontational actions peak in 2011, at the time of the mobilization by the Indignados. Even in the south, among countries with and without a protest wave, confrontational action remains rather limited.

Figure 5.3 presents a more detailed categorization of confrontational events in six selected countries. For this purpose, we used a refined coding scheme and choose two countries per region – Greece and Italy in the south, Germany and the United Kingdom in the north-west, and

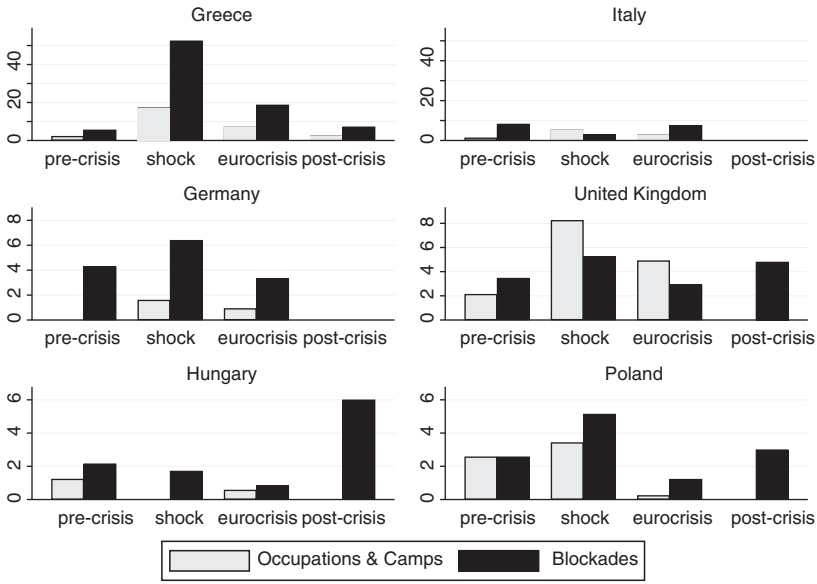

Figure 5.3 Confrontational action forms in six selected countries. *Note:* Here, we report numbers of events instead of shares. The scales differ by regions.

Hungary and Poland in the east.[7] This allows us to compare the occurrence of blockades to both protest camps and occupations in countries heavily and less heavily hit by the Great Recession.[8]

Except in the United Kingdom, blockades prevail as the traditional form of confrontational actions, while more innovative forms such as occupations and protest camps amount to only a small number of events. Unsurprisingly, we find most blockades in Greece, where the number of blockades increases during the shock period and the Euro crisis. Protest camps and occupations represent a much smaller number of confrontational events in Greece, but we observe a small peak in 2012, after the Indignados movement took place in Spain. In Italy, there is hardly any change in the use of occupations, blockades, and protest camps.

Interestingly, we notice a sizeable increase in occupations and protest camps in the United Kingdom. In this north-western country, not strongly hit by the crisis but facing a protest wave, we see some incidents of occupy-flavoured actions. These incidents stem from a broad array of motives and participants, among others foreign policy matters, i.e. Gaza and Kurdistan, environmental and workers claims, tuition fees, and resistance against tax avoidance. Only in October 2011, we find a series of Occupy Wall Street–inspired protest in the United Kingdom. In Poland, blockades and other confrontational actions are used either for economic protests, medical personnel, i.e. nurses and doctors seeking pay raises, or for environmental ones. The increase in Hungary in the post-crisis period refers to protest events regarding the refugee crisis.

We find limited evidence to support the hypothesis that innovations take place at the beginning of the crisis in the form of occupations (H3a). Looking at confrontational actions overall, we observe a peak at the onset of the crisis in SE. However, looking more specifically at four southern countries, we find a mixed pattern. Confrontational actions peak in Greece in September 2008 as reaction to the killing of a schoolboy by police forces and in 2011, when a series of blockades of infrastructure (e.g. airports, harbours, and highways) and public buildings, such as ministries and the parliament, hit the country. Moreover, the 'Indignant Citizens Movement' held a protest camp at the Syntagma

[7] As there are several studies on the *Indignados* in Spain, we choose not to study it and rather to analyse whether *Indignados*-flavored protest spilled over to other southern countries.

[8] We subsumed occupations and protest camp into one category, as they are innovations associated with the Great Recession.

Square during the summer of 2011. We also observe a small peak in confrontational action in Spain that coincides with the Indignados movement in 2011. Nevertheless, Greece seems to be an outlier with its important and lasting increase in confrontational actions. Moreover, only few confrontations took the form of occupations or protest camps. Turning to the other regions, these specific action forms did not travel to other countries not experiencing a protest wave and they were used (more prominently sometimes) prior to the crisis period. The relative importance of protest camps and occupations is modest even in countries strongly hit by the crisis. This shows the value of comparing different cases and including long periods of time when analysing changes and innovations in action repertoires.

5.4.2 Violent Protest Events as Early Drivers of Protest?

Violence is an integral part of contentious repertoires; hence, we analyse the timing of violent events. We examine whether they increased at the beginning of the protest wave when unorganized citizens take to the streets to express their grievances (hypothesis 3b).

As Figure 5.1 shows, violent political events constituted the second most common form of action in the north-west and south of Europe. Although its share is much lower than for the share of demonstrations, violence accounted for an average of 16 and 17 per cent of all protests respectively. By contrast, in CEE, the share of violent events was much lower, accounting for fewer than one-tenth of all protest events in the region.

Turning to fluctuations over time, in NWE, where we do not observe a quantitative expansion of protest, the share of violent events was stable over time. It remained at around 16 per cent throughout the entire time period covered here. Focusing on specific countries, some display a higher share of political violence compared to the others in NWE. Most importantly, this is the case for Northern Ireland, where the conflict between Catholics and Protestants resulted in violent events until the final peace agreement in 2007. In CEE, at a low level, the share of violent events declined over time across the countries in the region. Only Bulgaria (17 per cent in the Euro crisis) and Hungary (12 per cent in the shock period) diverged from this pattern. In Bulgaria, these violent actions result from the protests against the Borisov cabinet and their government austerity measures in 2013 and from the protests against the Oresharski cabinet in 2013 and 2014, which were more targeted towards a general dissatisfaction with the legitimacy of the government and its corruption. In Hungary, most violent events are related to a

series of murders and violence towards Romani people that began in mid-2008 and lasted for more than a year.

Most interesting for us is the timing of violent events in SE, where most of the protest took place. In this region, we observe a peak of violent events in the early phase of the crisis, when protest events became more numerous. During the shock period, the share of violent events went from the 17 per cent during the pre-crisis period to 25 per cent. Later on, during the second phase of the protest wave, violence declined and accounted for only 11 per cent of all events. This share then remained stable throughout the refugee crisis. As can be seen in Figure 5.2, the increased share of political violence observed in the south was mostly driven by events in Greece, where violent actions were skyrocketing to 35 per cent in late 2008. These developments are related to the 2008 street riots in Athens mentioned earlier. While political violence decreases in Spain, we find a small peak of violence in Portugal during the Euro crisis, which results from clashes between police and protestors on the sideline of several mass protests in 2012.

Our empirical finding lends support to the hypothesis based on Piven and Cloward's (1979) claim that violent events are part of an early phase of protest waves. They happen at the beginning of a protest wave, when citizens' strong dissatisfaction is voiced but not channelled through organizations and institutional politics. A movement is more radical at the beginning, before organized actors enter the protest scene and pacify the political conflict.

5.4.3 Institutionalizations of Protest During a Protest Wave

As a last step, we consider the possibility that a process of institutionalization takes place at the end of a protest wave. The institutionalization hypothesis predicts that protest events called by organizations replace those led by unorganized social groups during a protest wave (H3c). We study the share of events in which organizations were present and compare it to the share of events with only social groups mentioned. Additionally, we present the share of events in which both groups of actors participated. Then, we zoom in on the share of events led by trade unions, parties, and other civil society organizations (CSO) relative to all events. This strategy allows us to detect when and where the involvement of institutionalized actors increases.

We coded actors if they had called for, taken part in or organized an event. Excluding all protest events with no or only vague information on actors, such as mentions of 'protesters' or 'people', leaves us

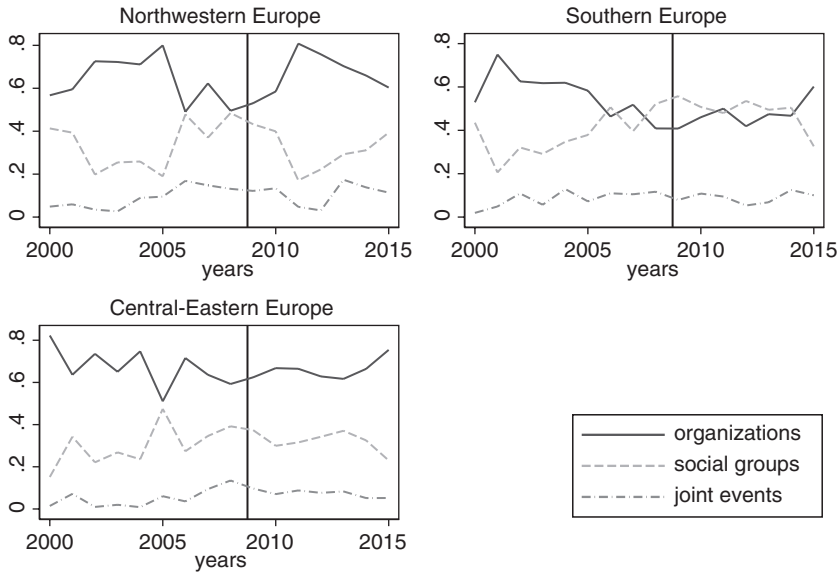

Figure 5.4 Shares of events led by institutionalized and non-institutionalized actors including joint events of both actor groups, relative to all events with information on actor types.

with 14,799 observations.[9] For our analyses, we aggregated categories to their more general level, e.g. left- and right-wing parties were subsumed under 'parties' and public and private sector unions were combined. This leaves us with six actor categories – three organized actors (parties, unions, and other civil society organizations) and three social groups (occupational groups, pensioners, and students).

Figure 5.4 shows the share of events with and without organizations by region. First, we see that, in the north-west and in the east, events with organizations prevail. They represent 50 per cent or more of all events in the north and around 60 per cent in the east. The south differs importantly with respect to this trend. There, organizations prevail prior to the crisis but their involvement steadily declines from 2005 onwards. The share of events carried by organizations reaches the lowest level in 2007 and only picks up again after the onset of the crisis. The engagement of social groups (with no mention of organizations

[9] This is around 50 per cent of all observations (total of 30,941).

being present) in protest follows a different trend. Social groups are increasingly present in the streets from the early 2000s onward and their activity steadily grows until 2014. This reflects the idea that digital tools and online activism facilitates the organization of protest (Earl and Kimport 2011). As noted for the Indignados (Anduiza, Cristancho, and Sabucedo 2014), organizations have generally become less central for protest in SE – their resources, infrastructure, and knowledge are less crucial to gather citizens in the streets.

Focusing on SE countries (results not presented here), we observe similar trends in the four countries – a growing presence of social groups that persists until the refugee crisis. In Italy, we see a steady growth from 2002 onwards. In Greece and Spain, the growth appears closer to the crisis period and is most visible in the early phase of the crisis. In Portugal, the share of events with organizations plummets in 2008 (prior to the crisis) while those with social groups skyrocket. Most of these events are related to truck drivers' protests against raising fuel prices taking the form of road blockades and torching vehicles. These events were not limited to Portugal; similar actions were taken in Spain, Greece, and even in Poland. Otherwise, in Portugal, organizations are involved in a majority of events (between 60 and 80 per cent).

Figure 5.5 shows the specific organized actors on the left-hand side. We present the share of union, party or CSO-led actions relative to all events with actor information in our dataset. On the right-hand side, we include the shares of events led by the different social groups, i.e. pensioners, students, and occupational groups. We observe that, in the north-west of Europe, unions are the organizations most often present in protest events. They are present in 30–50 per cent of the events. Their share grew slightly during the Great Recession – from 35 per cent in the pre-crisis period to 42 per cent during the eurozone crisis. Other types of CSOs are present in 10–20 per cent of the protest events. In 2005 – prior to the crisis – we find a peak in CSOs' activities due to a heterogeneous set of protest in some north-western countries.[10] Parties are present in 5–15 per cent of protest events. Their presence reached a low point in 2005. Then it increased steadily during the whole period

[10] It mostly captures events in Denmark, Belgium, and Northern Ireland. In Denmark, these events are manifold and do not cover any overarching trend. The events happening in Belgium are unrelated to domestic politics and happen in Brussel as the heart of the EU, covering several issues such as Turkey's EU membership, protest again US president George W. Bush, and so forth. The events in Northern Ireland are mostly related to the ongoing conflict between Protestants and Catholics, with 2005 marking Belfast's most widespread riots in a decade.

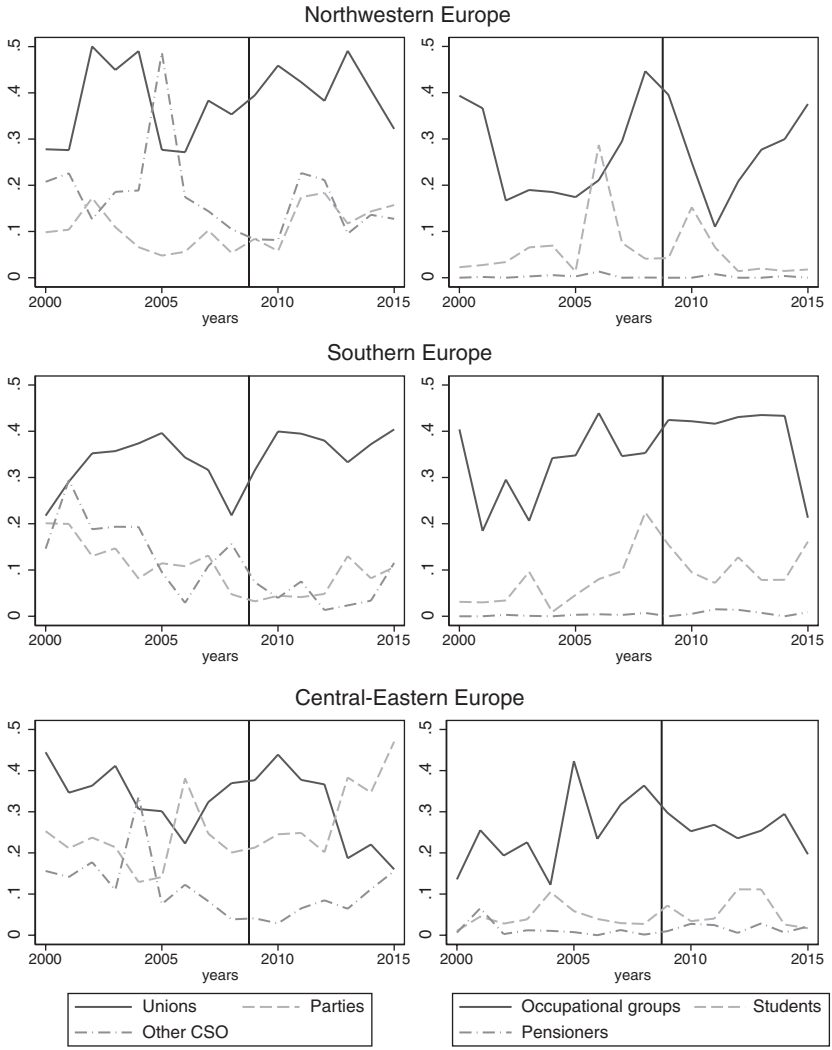

Figure 5.5 Share of actions led by different actors across regions, left: unions, parties, civil society organizations, right: occupational groups, students, and pensioners.

of the Great Recession. Chapter 11 will return in more detail to the specific role of parties for protest mobilization. Social groups are most often occupational groups; more rarely they are students or pensioners. The relative share of protest events involving occupational groups varies considerably across time.

In eastern Europe, it is trade unions that are most present in the streets. Their relative share of protests is stable throughout the pre-crisis period and most of the Great Recession (around 35 per cent) but it declines drastically after 2012 and during the refugee crisis (14 per cent). In contrast, the relative presence of civil society organizations increased modestly during the crisis (from 4 to 14 per cent), while that of political parties grew massively (from 23 to 53 per cent) and reached unprecedented levels during the refugee crisis. In eastern Europe, parties combine electoral and protest strategies when dealing with issues that are central in their political agenda. Turning to social groups, occupational groups also predominated in CEE and their relative share of protest is rather stable throughout the crisis period (from 26 to 32 per cent).

In the south of Europe, we find again that unions are very active with the highest relative share (between 20 and 40 per cent), while parties and CSOs display equivalent shares (between 20 and 5 per cent). Regarding the timing of their presence, parties and unions were less present during the shock period than later on during the crisis. As protest picked up, organized political actors constituted a smaller share of all the actors on the streets: The relative presence of parties dropped from 13 to 4 per cent and that of unions from 33 to 24 per cent. In parallel, students became more active in the protest scene before the collapse of Lehman Brothers' and during this early phase of the protest wave. Their relative share multiplied fivefold. Students accounted for only 5 per cent of all actors in the pre-crisis phase while they represented as much as 25 per cent of all actors during the shock period. This, however, was a rather short-lived phenomenon. As the protest wave unfolded in the south of Europe, organized actors were increasingly present on the streets. The presence of parties did not recover to pre-crisis levels (7 per cent only), whereas trade unions gained visibility on the streets, accounting for a larger share of all actors during the eurozone crisis (38 per cent).

Regarding institutionalization, we find little support for our hypothesis 3c. The growing presence of social groups in protest events corresponds to changes that take place in the longer term; their presence grows already prior to the crisis, and is not associated specifically with the Great Recession. In turn, the presence of organizations grows slightly during the eurozone crisis in Greece and Portugal, but the patterns are less stable in the other two SE countries.

5.5 Conclusion

How did the Great Recession shape and change protest repertoires? Which actors became more active in the protest arena? In this chapter, we described the contentious repertoires across three European regions – north-western, southern, and central and eastern Europe – and in the four different periods related to the Great Recession. Our findings show that stability prevails in action repertoires across regions and even in countries facing a protest wave. Protesters use mainly demonstrations and strikes, few innovations have made it to the protest scene, early signs of political violence were limited, and the growing presence of (unorganized) social groups reflects longer-term trends. Overall, we observe business as usual in the streets of Europe.

One feature common to all three regions is that demonstrations were the most widely used form of political protest. This customary form prevailed not only during the pre-crisis period but also during the recession, from 2008 to 2015. We observed only minor shifts in the general repertoires across the three regions. Demonstrations are most widespread in the three regions, while strikes were declining in NWE and CEE. In the south, the share of strikes dropped during the shock period but then recovered during the Euro crisis. We observed an outburst of confrontational and violent events in the south, but this development was not only short-lived – it happened during the shock period and was soon replaced by traditional repertoires of action, but also mainly confined to Greece, where it was, moreover, largely unrelated to the economic crisis. Innovations in contentious repertoires were limited to a short period of increased confrontational events. This period was accompanied by growing political violence, but it was also limited in time. Hence, we conclude that stability prevailed in contentious repertoires during the 2000s in the three regions.

Our findings show that the contentious repertoires in the younger democracies of CEE mainly resembled those of NWE and SE. In the CEE, demonstrations were the customary form of protest over time. The Great Recession, in turn, manifested itself in a brief outburst of protest early in the shock period rather than in a continuous wave of protest.

In NWE, our data reveal the prevalence of standard repertoires and a trend towards the pacification of conflicts in the streets. In eastern and southern Europe political violence peaked at the beginning of the Great Recession. This finding is at odds with the literature on protest waves and radicalization (Tarrow 1989). Instead, it supports the idea that violent events take place in early phases of protest waves, prior to

the mobilization of organized actors (Piven and Cloward 1977). We have not found evidence of a revolutionary process at play during the Great Recession. Violent action increased early in the protest waves but soon died out.

Even in the south, where a protest wave took place, we have uncovered surprisingly little evidence of transformations in the action form used. We did not observe an important and lasting increase in occupations and protest camps. However, it is important to mention one limitation of our study, i.e. we do not analyse online activism. Our data does not allow us to consider e-protest during the crisis. Some innovations in the action repertoires may have taken place online during the crisis, not only actions enabling offline protest but also actions taking place solely online.

We observed limited evidence for the proposed institutionalization, i.e., organizations taking over protest started by social groups. To the contrary, we have found some evidence of a growing involvement of social groups over time, including during the early phase of protest in the south. However, trade union and political party activities only declined in the early phase of the protest wave and they picked up during the shock period. The declining presence of organizations in the streets of SE seems to be a long-term trend. The growing involvement of social groups without organizations began already in the early 2000s.

In this chapter, we have identified differences and commonalities in the action repertoires and the presence of actors in regions facing a protest wave and those not. The next chapter deals with the different sets of issues addressed in these protest events. It asks whether the Great Recession mainly triggered economic protest or whether it fostered protest addressing multiple issues in addition to economic ones.

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